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Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service

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## WILDLIFE SERVICES—VIRGINIA

### Contact Information:

Scott Barras, Virginia Wildlife Services State Director  
P.O. Box 130, Moseley, VA 23120  
Phone: (804) 739-7739 FAX: (804) 739-7738  
Toll-Free Number: 1-866-4USDAWS 1-866-487-3297  
E-mail: [scott.c.barras@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:scott.c.barras@aphis.usda.gov)  
Web site: [www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\\_damage](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage)

### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Virginia

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on Virginia Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists respond with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks. It protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases and predation; guards natural resources, such as endangered mussels and shorebirds; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by Virginia WS include protecting threatened birds from predation; sampling and monitoring for avian influenza and wildlife-borne diseases; and managing damage caused by beavers, starlings, and other wildlife.



### Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

**Protecting Livestock from Predation**—Coyote predation to sheep, goats, and calves has escalated since the 1980's. Prior to the WS cooperative predation management program, the average sheep producer lost 17 lambs to coyotes each year. Today, losses average three sheep per farm per year. Most coyote predation on livestock occurs in southwest or southern Virginia. WS assisted more than 350 livestock producers in 2005 and 2006.

**Protecting Livestock from Feral Hog Diseases**—Possibly introduced to Virginia by hunters and operators of shooting enclosures, feral hogs sometimes are illegally imported without necessary health certificates. They can carry

diseases, which could infect livestock and result in the loss of trade and the disease-free status. In 2006, WS helped the State eradicate feral hogs at an enclosure that tested positive for brucellosis and pseudorabies.

**Protecting Human Safety at Airports**—The Federal Aviation Administration, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, and Virginia Department of Aviation recognize WS as the expert in reducing threats to aviation. WS conducts wildlife hazard assessments and management plans, reduces threats to aviation safety by altering habitat, harassment, excluding wildlife from airfields, and, sometimes, removing hazardous wildlife. WS assisted six military airfields, nine certificated airports, and nine general aviation airports in Virginia in the last two years.

**Increasing Safety on Highways**—Beaver damage Virginia highways by flooding, saturating road beds, and felling trees, which increases maintenance costs and threatens highway safety. WS assists by making site and wetland evaluations and removing problem beaver, which saved the State Department of Transportation more than \$743,000 in 2006, a cost benefit ratio of 1:3.36. Unique to Virginia, the joint site and wetland evaluation procedure provides added environmental protection.

#### Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting property and public safety from beaver damage
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Protecting people, pets, and livestock from raccoon rabies
- Managing damage caused by Canada geese
- Protecting livestock and pets from coyote and black vulture predation

#### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Virginia:

- Improving roost dispersal methods and toxic baits for nuisance bird roosts to reduce property damage
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Improving knowledge about eastern coyotes to reduce predation on livestock
- Developing population models for nuisance species
- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies

### Protecting Human Health from Wildlife

**Disease**—Over 90% of Virginia's rabies cases occurred in wild animals, mostly raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. Raccoon rabies occurs in all but four southwestern counties. WS participates in a multi-state effort to prevent the westward spread of raccoon rabies, implementing a 35-mile wide barrier of vaccinated raccoons along the Appalachian Ridge from Ohio, through Virginia, and into Alabama. Virginia WS assists in monitoring for raccoon rabies and in public education. It partnered with county and State health departments in 2005 to conduct enhanced surveillance when the first outbreak of raccoon rabies occurred on Chincoteague Island just prior to the annual pony swim. WS removed 51 raccoons, 26% of which were rabies positive.

WS has partnered with several State agencies to survey wild waterfowl and shorebirds for avian influenza. Part of a national effort to detect highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza, this would allow agriculture and health officials to respond and to protect Virginia's poultry industry and the public health from a potentially harmful disease.

**Protecting Birds and Endangered Mussels from Predation**—Some of Virginia's birds nest on the State's barrier and bay islands. Many have declined up to 85% in the last 20 years due to raccoon, red fox, and gull predation. Some, such as piping plovers and gull-billed terns, are now threatened species. In a public-private effort, WS' management plan protects birds and implemented predator removal from eight barrier islands and two Chesapeake Bay islands. Virginia now boasts the highest piping plover fledgling rate in the nation with 1.52 chicks per pair, a doubling of oystercatcher production on Metompkin Island, re-colonization of three islands by piping plovers, and return of least terns on Craney Island.

Unfortunately, some mussel species in the Clinch and Powell River drainages have yet to recover from historic over-harvest and water quality problems. Despite improvements, predation occurs and sedimentation has increased. WS assists the recovery of this Virginia resource by removing muskrats and raccoons that eat rare mussels and beavers that bury them with silt in small stretches of the river drainages.

### Major Cooperators

- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Virginia Departments of Transportation and of Health
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority
- Virginia Cooperative Extension Service
- Langley Air Force Base
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration

### Addressing Property Damage Caused by

**Vultures**—Black and turkey vulture populations have increased 147% and 59%, respectively, in the last 20 years. Vulture roosts may contain more than 1,000 birds and damage homes. The birds defecate everywhere and the overpowering ammonia-like odor prevents people from using their property. WS helps communities set up harassment programs to disperse vultures and, when necessary, to obtain Federal permits to shoot birds which reinforces harassment using effigies. WS has helped more than 60 towns with large vulture roosts.

**Protecting Property from Canada Geese**—More than 140,000 Canada geese call Virginia home, and each produces more than three pounds of feces daily. About 200 homeowners, golf courses, schools, and other sites request assistance with goose problems each year. Property owners are taught to exclude and harass the geese and, where feasible, set up hunting programs. Sometimes the best solution is a population reduction to more reasonable numbers. In its removal program in about 22 communities, when requested, WS captures nearly 2,000 resident Canada geese each summer and donates them to local food charity programs.

**Protecting Property from Deer and Pigeons**—With more than one-million deer, Virginia's white-tail population may be higher than pre-colonial times. The result has been damage to plants on private property, bird nesting habitat, and public forests as well as increased deer-vehicle collisions. WS works with local governments and residents to limit damage by reducing local deer populations. Sharpshooting programs have been implemented in northern Virginia, the eastern shore, the New River Valley, and at numerous airports around the State using WS expertise.

Pigeons, a foreign species, have settled from farms to cities. Their acidic fecal droppings can spread disease, deface public areas, discourage business, and contribute to unhealthy work environments. With the tools and knowledge to reduce pigeon populations, WS works with dozens of localities annually.

### Looking to the Future

Overwhelmed by increasing requests for wildlife damage assistance, local government may lack the expertise, resources, and legal authority to manage wildlife. Wildlife Services is challenged to create effective programs for urban and suburban areas with scarce funding. Also, the role of private sector nuisance wildlife control operators needs further refinement to assist with a growing problem.

Additional attention must be given to property damage and to human safety, particularly at airports. As wildlife populations and daily flights continue to increase, WS needs to do more to protect the public, support the military mission, and assist businesses by protecting species.

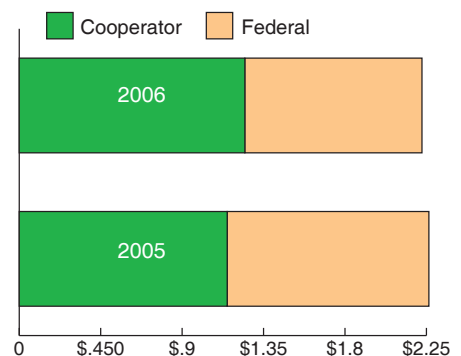
Some wildlife species are overabundant, while others are becoming rare due to predation or to competition with better adapted wildlife. For healthy ecosystems, WS may be asked to reduce predation pressures on rare species and funding sources must be identified to protect such special public resources. WS will continue in the National effort to prevent the spread of raccoon rabies, and, hopefully, to eliminate it.

The State's largest employer, agriculture makes the largest economic impact of any industry. Competitively low profit margins make staying in business difficult for family farms. WS will look for more ways to help Virginia agriculture by finding cost-effective and practical ways to reduce competition with increasing numbers of deer, coyotes, vultures, and other wildlife.

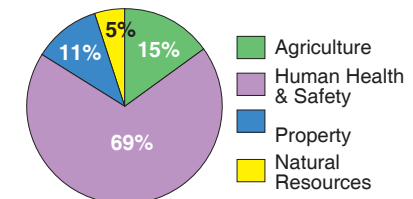
### Virginia Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators who have a vested interest in the program: such as livestock producers, private individuals, businesses and other Federal, State, and local government agencies.

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA is an equal employment provider and employer.